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Everett, William

HENRY WARREN TORREY, Professor Emeritus of Ancient and Modern History in the University at Cambridge, was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts, November 11, 1814. He was the son of John Torrey and Marcia Otis, daughter of Henry and Mary Warren of Plymouth. He was educated in the Adams Grammar School in Boston, where he received a Franklin Medal at ten years old, losing his father in the same year (1824). He was a pupil of the Boston Latin School under Master B. A. Gould, completing the five years' course in four years, from 1825 to 1829, and graduating from Harvard College in 1833, where he stood second in rank, the late Professor Bowen being first.

He was usher at the Latin School under Master F. P. Leverett, whom he assisted greatly in the compilation of his Latin Lexicon. The English-Latin part of this book was entirely prepared by him, and the part of it from A to C was an original work, where Mr. Torrey had in sober earnest attempted that almost impossible task, the preparation of a book really worth the name, to assist in translating good English into good Latin. At this stage of the work he was forced to desist, and for the remainder to confine himself to a recasting of "Ainsworth," a task singularly uncongenial to Mr. Torrey, whose fine mind was one of the first to recognize the worthlessness of Ainsworth's Dictionary, — a work to be recast only by being cast into the fire.

His service on the two Lexicons had practically ruined his eyes; but this loss did not deter him from studying law at New Bedford in the office of his accomplished and ever genial uncle, the Hon. Charles Henry Warren. He was admitted to the bar, but never practised, on account of his eyes. He kept school in Providence for a year and a half, and made a voyage to the Azores with Hon. William W. Swain. This was one of the many vain efforts of that warm-hearted and excellent man to restore health to his son Robert, whose lovely character, tried in the furnace of scarcely intermitted suffering, only seemed to approach nearer to the angels with every hour that brought him to his end at the age of twenty-one.

Mr. Torrey was again instructor in the Latin School in 1842, and Tutor in History and Instructor in Elocution at Harvard College from 1844 to 1848. For the next eight years he kept a girls' school at No. 5 Hamilton Place in Boston, with his sister, which

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attained the highest reputation. In 1856 the McLean Professorship of Ancient and Modern History, for many years vacant through the meanest of political intrigues, was conferred on him. He immediately took a year of European travel, and returned to discharge the duties of his professorship in 1857. He was engaged in its active labors till 1866, and was then appointed Professor Emeritus. While holding this title he was chosen on the Board of Overseers, and died on the anniversary of the death of Washington, December 14, 1893. He was elected to the American Academy, November 12, 1856.

Mr. Torrey's active life was that of a teacher. It is of little moment to speculate whether he might not have distinguished himself in some other line. He was emphatically an instructor, and not a few of his pupils are yet living who feel that he was the best instructor they ever had,—the one to whom they owe most.

He was a teacher according to the old fashion; that is, being a scholar and a student himself, he expected his pupils to be scholars and students on the lines he laid down for them. He impressed upon all of them the idea that he who will not work cannot learn; and that both working and learning must be done in the line of duty,—that of subjecting one's own mind and energy to the control of those in rightful authority. He never swerved from this rule, yet he administered it with such unvarying sympathy and kindness that no pupil who was worth teaching ever felt any sense of coercion or harsh pressure, or was other than stimulated and braced by his kindly insistence. As soon as his pupils had done their work his began. He supplied to them an amount of knowledge, not only on the specific subjects they were studying, but on a score of others, which they never could have acquired without repeating his own indefatigable labor. From first to last this knowledge was unerringly accurate. A mistake of fact was to Professor Torrey simply an untruth; and to state a name or a date incorrectly was to falsify. Whatever was not right was wrong.

But he did not end with facts. He combined his vast stock of information into an organic whole by the spirit of a philosophy which soared far above the mere earth of accumulation which makes up so much of human learning. The effect of this constructive power on his pupils was startling, if such a word can be applied to so precise and gentle a character. A student might come before him, fancying he knew a good deal of history for a

young man; he might have studied it, read it, or even, as a boy does, written it; then would Mr. Torrey reveal to him, not only how little all this information was, but how infinitely greater and better in kind was the Philosophy of History, — the relation of nation to nation, of period to period, and of all to the mighty scheme of Providence which he saw working through all time. Yet in all this setting forth the great subject in its true perspective, and making the amount of his pupils' knowledge appear very small, there was absolutely nothing unkind, no undervaluing a single real acquirement. On the contrary, he made the value of every pupil's attainments far greater than it would have been had they gone on without him in their own boyish way and spirit.

This power of lighting up the specific subjects that he treated was nowhere better shown than in his instruction on the Constitution of the United States. Not a few of his pupils have been called upon to serve in positions of authority under that august instrument; and none of them would deny that they received from his instructions an understanding of their practical duties which no other teacher, public or private, could give.

But more than one teacher is learned and stimulating, and yet is entirely without two things which were the very life and soul of Mr. Torrey's instruction: first, his affectionate heart, which went out to every pupil who would accept it as to a personal friend; and, secondly, his supreme allegiance to duty, wherewith he tried, in that absolute simplicity which was his nature, to inspire his pupils, as might an elder brother who knew that if they did not follow the way of right they never could accomplish anything worth doing. That nobody could really be a good scholar, or a good historian, without being a good man, was the core of all his teaching; and it was worth while to be under him, if only to learn this one thing.

Such was the man in the class-room, clinging to the old-fashioned discipline and methods, which he might well think the best, because his own glowing personality had warmed them into a vital force that needed no further kindling from modern devices. There was a certain veil of formality about his presence which might at first deter one from penetrating into a more intimate knowledge. Yet something about his ready smile and his eager manner, never cold though always courteous, encouraged his pupils to bring to him personal requests and difficulties, which were invariably received half-way, and proved the ready key to



outside acquaintance. The threshold once passed, it seemed amazing that one ever could have considered him formal. No heartier or more genial friendship ever glowed in a human breast. He had been brought up under one of the most brilliant wits of his day, the late Judge Warren, already named; and an inherited playfulness, softened by an ever-present sense of propriety and modesty, made his conversation inexpressibly delightful. It was so to all; but it was most peculiarly so to such as having been his pupils became after an interval his colleagues in instruction. To them his house and his heart were open in a combination of the elder and the equal hard to describe. There was nothing that mind or heart desired to fill the void caused by exhausting daily work, to heal the blows received from daily stupidity, waywardness, and ingratitude, which a younger teacher could not find in his company,—sympathizing with one's annoyances, confirming one's purposes, elevating one from depressing doubts. It had been much to sit at his feet and obey him; it was infinitely more to sit by his side and love him; and the world is darker since his presence has been withdrawn.

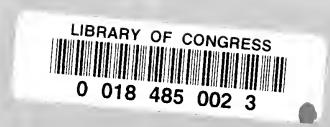
Having given years of such public and private work to the College, he saw with pain that methods and aims with which he found it hard to sympathize were in the ascendant; but there was no want of loyalty in the efforts which he made to accept them; and though he distrusted seriously the indefinite extension of an elective system, that system received no better assistance than he gave it in his advanced courses. The best of the old was equal to the best of the new. It was touching to see how, on not a few occasions, his faultless pen, from which flowed the purest of old classical English, was employed to give adequate form to matter which certainly did not originate with his suggestions.

His nature was sensitive; but it was not the sensitiveness of a morbid or selfish constitution,—it was the sensitiveness of his Pilgrim ancestors,—the sensitiveness of a conscience which loved and courted the gaze of Heaven, and shrank from every transgression of absolute right as an insult to the God of truth. His untiring industry, his capacious and penetrating intellect, his ardent energy, were all directed and chastened by his ever living sense of Christian duty; and his work, which may pass unchallenged the severest tests of practical humanity, was devised, carried on, and completed in strictest view of the higher scrutiny which belongs to an eternal standard and an unseen Judge.

1894.

WILLIAM EVERETT.





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